

Mary Helen Roberts

Vice Chair Human Services

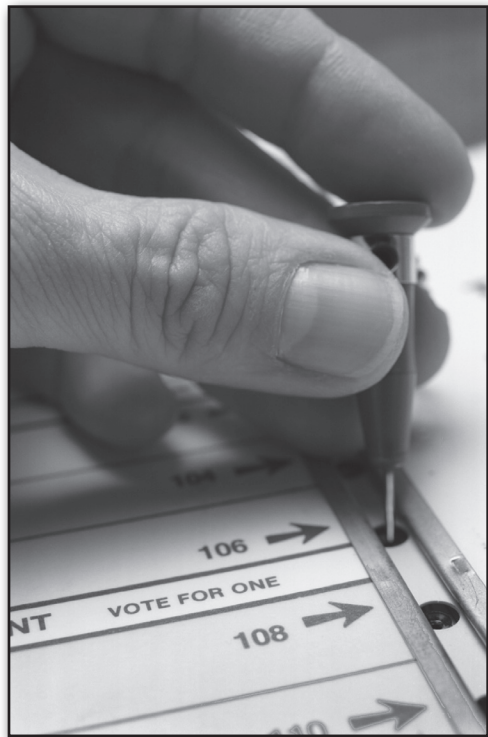
THE 2007 ELECTIONS – HOW DID YOU VOTE, AND WHY?

Just over half of registered voters in Snohomish County (51.18%) cast a ballot in the recent November elections. While an exact breakdown of how voters in the 21st Legislative District voted isn't yet available from the Secretary of State, the Snohomish County Auditor's website has information on how the various ballot initiatives, referenda, and legislative proposals fared countywide. Here is what their data tells us:

Initiative 960, the initiative requiring either a two-thirds vote in each house of the legislature or voter approval for all tax increases, **passed with 53.75%** of the vote.

House Joint Resolution 4204, the legislative proposal for changing the supermajority requirement for school district tax levies to a simple majority one, **passed with 51.39%** of the vote.

The **Sound Transit** and **RTID** proposals lost by **55.64%** and **57.58%** respectively.



These results made me curious about what your priorities are, and how you think the legislature should be spending money. For example, voters didn't want to support either transportation proposal to deal with our traffic problems. Yet we know traffic is a huge problem in the 21st district, and the entire Puget Sound region in general – one that will only get worse if we do nothing. So, what should we do? What are you willing to do to ease traffic problems? Can you use transit more often, change your commute hours or work out of your home occasionally? Would you vote for smaller, more specific transportation proposals? Additionally, the passage of

I-960 shows that voters want a say about tax increases. Are there specific programs you are willing to see cut? The state's largest spending categories are education and health care. Should we cut health care for children? Public safety? Parks and recreation?

As we head into the 2008 legislative session, your feedback is important to me. On my website, I have set up a link to a Legislative Priorities Survey that I hope you will take the time to complete. This is a way for you to give me greater understanding of your priorities. Please visit <http://www.housedemocrats.wa.gov/members/roberts/> to take the survey. Thank you.

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Winter 2008 Legislative Update

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State Representative
Mary Helen Roberts

21st Legislative District

Committees:

- Human Services, Vice Chair
- Higher Education
- Early Learning & Children's Services

Winter 2008 Legislative Update

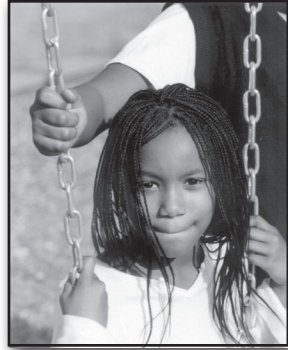


What I've Been Working On

Mary Helen Roberts

Vice Chair Human Services

FOSTER CARE



Improving foster care in our state is an issue with which I've become very involved. As the parent of two grown daughters, I know firsthand the importance of a stable, caring home in a child's life. Unfortunately, in the past year there have been several tragic stories in the media about children for whom our foster care system failed. Like you, I have found these stories heartbreaking and disturbing. **When a foster child falls through the cracks, we all pay a price.**

Last session:

In 2007, I championed HB 1201, a bill that extended health care coverage for foster children through age 21, up from age 18. Most insurance plans allow parents to keep covering their children beyond age 18 – often into their mid-20's. Yet foster children automatically lost coverage at age 18, when the state cut them off. Most joined the ranks of our state's uninsured. I felt this was unfair to these kids who, through no fault of their own, didn't have parents to keep insuring them. My bill passed both House and Senate nearly unanimously – proving that both sides of the aisle agreed with me.

This session:

In 2008 and beyond, I will continue to champion bills to improve our foster care system and help our foster kids stay healthy and safe. Please check my website for updates.

Foster Kid Facts:

Every year, about 19,000 Washington state children receive foster or group care services.

A study by the Washington Education Foundation found that an estimated 50-75% of school-aged children who enter foster care must leave their school districts because foster homes are not available near their current homes. Academic experts estimate that children lose up to 4-6 months of progress every time their education is interrupted by a change of schools.

An estimated 30-80% of foster children have chronic medical conditions, with an estimated 25% of foster children having 3 or more chronic conditions.

A study of foster care "alumni" from the Northwest found that the majority faced significant challenges in the areas of mental health, education, employment and finances. More than half of the 659 alumni studied had clinical levels of at least one mental health problem, 1 in 4 experienced post-traumatic stress disorder in the prior year, only 16% completed a vocational degree, more than 1 in 5 experienced homelessness after leaving foster care, and 1/3 had no health insurance.



Foster Parents Needed!

Statewide Foster Parent Recruitment Hotline (Operated by YMCA Family Services) Call toll-free 1-800-760-5340

What I've Been Working On

MAKING COMMUNITIES SAFER

I'm concerned about how many people we're locking up, and what it's costing us. Our state prisons are filled to capacity, and building new facilities costs millions of taxpayer dollars. Last spring, I attended a graduation ceremony at the Monroe prison complex, where the majority of inmates lack a high school education and leave prison facing significant challenges to finding housing or landing a job.

Prison Population Facts:

The sad truth is, at least 40% of former inmates are back behind bars within five years.

It costs taxpayers an average of \$29,590 a year per inmate to keep someone in prison. There are currently more than 16,000 inmates in Washington's prisons.



Nationwide, ¾ of incarcerated men are fathers. But the fastest growing population of inmates is women, many of whom also have children.

Research tells us that at least 50% of the children of incarcerated parents end up incarcerated themselves at some point.

So, how do we reduce the prison population while keeping our communities safe?

I have long supported more education in prison. Some people think that's being soft on crime. I don't. Studies have shown that educating prisoners reduces recidivism (re-offending). **Reducing recidivism reduces victims.**

Last session:

Studies have also shown that when the children of incarcerated parents are able to maintain relationships with their parents, the parents are less likely to re-offend. The children also benefit from the relationship, do better in school and are less likely to enter the criminal justice system. In 2007, I sponsored HB 1422, which directs several state agencies to adopt policies and programs encouraging contact between inmates and their children. This bill passed with strong bipartisan support and was signed by the governor.

This session:

Advocating for more education in prison remains one of my top issues. Additionally, this session we will be examining our state's current sex offender laws. Although they are among the toughest in the nation, the tragic killing last summer of a young Tacoma girl prompted the governor to convene a task force, which came up with several recommendations. Almost 20% of those serving time in Washington's prisons are incarcerated for serious sexual crimes. The correct management and treatment of these offenders is a public safety issue. The governor's 2008 supplemental budget proposal includes \$8.24 million in targeted investments to better supervise sex offenders who have completed their sentence and keep communities safe. We will be examining these investments in the upcoming session.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Last session:

The 2007-09 capital budget called on the University of Washington (UW) to, "govern and operate an additional branch campus to be located in the Snohomish, Island, Skagit area. Top priorities for the campus include expansion of upper division capacity for transfer students and graduate students in high demand programs, with a particular focus on science, technology, and engineering." The budget also set aside \$4 million for the state Office of Financial Management (OFM) and UW to create a preliminary academic plan for a new UW branch campus in the Snohomish-Island-Skagit County area, as well as options and recommendations on where to locate it.

This session:

The process of establishing a UW branch campus in the north sound area continues. Recently, OFM and the UW released their reports. Here are a few key points:

The list of viable sites for a branch campus was trimmed to four with the Pacific Station site in Everett ranked as the preferred site.

Enrollment for the new campus is projected to be 5,059 students (4,452 undergraduate and 607 graduate) in 2025, 5,272 students (4,639 undergraduate and 633 graduate) in 2030 and 6,393 students (5,626 undergraduate and 767 graduate) in 2040.

Full capital costs for the new campus are estimated to range from \$645 to \$803 million in 2007 dollars, excluding sales tax, construction contingencies,

and site costs. The report argues it will be a minimum of six years, and more realistically 10+ years, before construction of such a large campus could be completed.

A final academic report for the campus is due in June of 2008. It is unlikely that any major decisions about the branch campus will be made in the 2008 session, but as a member of the House Higher Education committee, I will be directly involved in legislation pertaining to a UW North Sound campus.

As a strong supporter of higher education, I think it is exciting to consider expanding our system. However, our community already benefits from high quality

programs offered in or near the district through Edmonds, Everett, and Cascadia Community Colleges, Central Washington University on the Edmonds CC campus, and the UW Bothell branch campus. The "UW North" would be a great addition, however I want to make sure that existing programs are not robbed of vital resources to add another campus to the system. Your feedback on this issue is important to me.

